

# Viewpoints on recognition and education

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## Resumen

Este artículo fija su atención en el papel del Reconocimiento dentro de contextos educativos y pretende que sea legitimada su significación, de manera que en cualquier situación educativa se cultiven el afecto y la sensibilidad. Se recomienda un compromiso no sólo para el desarrollo cognitivo de los estudiantes sino para el de su integridad como personas, lo que implica atender varias facetas en ocasiones descuidadas –como la de las emociones o la de la espiritualidad–, que sin embargo favorecen ya desde los centros pre-escolares la formación de la identidad íntegra de los jóvenes. Al prestar atención a las relaciones interpersonales y crear un ambiente de apoyo dentro de la clase se consigue mejorar la práctica académica y el aprendizaje, que se convierte en más holístico e independiente de la perspectiva de los adultos.

**Palabras clave:** Reconocimiento, Aceptación de las diferencias, Pedagogía de la alteridad, Teoría de las relaciones de Schibbye, Bae, Illeris, Educación y Aprendizaje infantil.

## Abstract

This article focuses on the role of Recognition in educational contexts and attempt the legitimation of its significance so that in every teaching situation the affective and sensitive education. A commitment for the cognitive development and for the own selves of the students is recommended. This implies to look at several elements sometimes neglected –as the emotions or the spirituality–, that however encourages already in pre-school institutions in order to improve the identity of young people as a whole person. To pay attention to the relationships with others and to create a supportive environment in the classroom is a way to improve the academic performance and the child's learning, that becomes more holistic and independent of the adult's perspective

**Key Words:** Recognition, Sensivity to differences, Pedagogy of Individual choices, Schibbye's theory of relations, Bae, Illeris, Child's Education and Learning.

In an article in the last publication of the European Affective Education Network Ron Best (2003) asks whether we really are committed to the education of the child as a whole person. Or are we in fact only concerned about their cognitive development (p. 21)? The article refers to a number of areas whic contemporary schooling has come to neglect, particularly relationships, empathy, spirituality and the emotions.

The aim of this article is to highlight the contribution that recognition can give to the development of educational practice in schools and pre-school institutions. That recognition provides us with a normative and theoretical framework, which can compensate for the heavy emphasis on cognitive development in schools today. Recognition encourages *learning beyond cognition*.

The dynamics of recognition are intrinsically connected with processes of learning and identity formation. Recognition offers a way of thinking which both encourages the development of the whole child and can improve learning. Schools and teachers can work with recognition as a basis for liberal or affective education (*bildung*) and to improve formal, curriculum-based learning and qualifications.

This paper presents the concept of recognition in an educational perspective as it has been understood and applied by Norwegian practitioners and researchers, particularly by Schibbye and Bae. Studies are referred from Norway and Denmark.

## On recognition

The main point of this article is to argue that *working with recognition in education can make a difference*. That is to say using recognition as a basis for practice in daily life in schools and day-care centres provides a philosophical and theoretical platform which can have a significant effect on the content and nature of communication between adults and children in practice. This in turn creates good conditions for children's development and learning. Thinking in terms of recognition puts us in touch with vital processes within ourselves and in our relationships with others. These questions are of concern to us all as human beings, but are of special interest for teachers and other professionals in education.

The word recognition is used in English to convey acknowledgment, to signify that something or someone is seen or identified as known before. In addition to this straightforward everyday usage, the concept of recognition is used in other contexts, where the complexity and depth of the concept becomes apparent. Since Hegel's use of recognition (Wind, 1998) in a philosophical context, the concept has played a role in other fields and disciplines, such as political science, ethics, law, religion, and in recent years in social philosophy, psychology and educational science or pedagogy (Willig, 2003; Schibbye, 2004).

The act of recognition is an effort to grasp or come into contact with the perspective or consciousness of the other as a sovereign subject. Thus, the dimension of relatedness or relationships is at the heart of recognition, which is closely linked with the development and maintenance of identity or self. It is by thinking in these terms that we as adults can understand how vital a role we play in the formation of the child's self or identity. In our communication with children we

create the preconditions through which they experience - and thereby develop - their own selves.

Recognition concerns our ability to leave or suspend our own perspective or viewpoint and to share the perspective of the other. This sharing is not a purely an intellectual or cognitive exercise, but is a broader, experiential form of sharing, which includes both cognitive and emotional elements. This requires a degree of interest, inquiry or curiosity on our behalf (Møller, 2006).

The phenomenon of recognition is intrinsically connected to the question of free will. When we use force, manipulation or coercion there is no recognition. Recognition as an act can only be an act of free will, given by one sovereign subject to another. The purpose in this article is a way of attempt to persuade the reader to take an interest in recognition, but to show recognition to the reader requires to accept that the reader as a free subject can choose to accept or reject the ideas offered to share here.

According to Hegel the consciousness of the individual evolves through interaction with the consciousness of others (Schibbye, 2004). The development of consciousness is in this respect to see or reflect oneself in the other, a process or movement whereby we develop and change as a result of the nature of our interaction with others. We become and understand ourselves through the way in which we perceive and learn about ourselves through others. This dialectic process fuels the development of consciousness, but also reveals a fundamental paradox, in which we are dependent on others for the development of our identity, independence or self.

This poses a dilemma for the actor faced with the need for attachment and relationships with others and the opposing fundamental need to be a separate, independent self. According to Hegel, this dilemma is a basic condition for us as human beings (Schibbye 2004). Anxiety is a factor in this connection as we live with the conflict between anxiety related to dependence and anxiety concerning independence. We fear being engulfed by dominant others, losing our boundaries, integrity and sense of self. But we also fear loneliness, rejection or being isolated from others.

On the other hand, according to Hegel, we have no choice but to live with this dilemma (Schibbye, 1988). Yet through our relationships with others, especially through the existential and emotional dimensions of our relationships, we can transcend this dilemma. Berit Bae makes the point here that: *"It is a paradox that we develop a relationship to ourselves –and thereby a differentiated and independent self– through acknowledgement or recognition from others."* (Bae og Waastad, 1992 p .25; my translation)

The concept of recognition has a normative content or dimension, in the sense that recognition also represents an ideal for our relationships with others. This

entails that I as a sovereign individual regard my neighbour as an independent or autonomous subject, a person worthy of respect and understanding. Recognition leads us to respect the integrity of our fellow human beings. Thus to be met with recognition from others means that the individual has the sovereign right to define the nature of his experience of himself and the world (Schibbye, 1988).

Relationships based on recognition are relationships between two equal subjects. A subject-object approach where the other becomes an instrument or object whereby I fulfill my needs excludes recognition. Thinking in terms of recognition is thus intrinsically linked to the principle of equality, where a vital concern is our ability to relate to, sense, identify with or understand the world as experienced by others.

In her work with recognition the Norwegian professor Berit Bae emphasizes the importance of what can be termed *parallel learning* (medlæring, Bae, 1996; my translation). As teachers, social educators, parents or others we communicate our values not only through the explicit content of the spoken word - what we say - but also as a result of our metacommunication – i.e. how we say, what we say. Tone of voice, facial expression, body language, expression of emotion, intonation and so on all convey information which are communicated to others along with the explicit content in question, such as the subject matter being taught in a lesson by a teacher. Thus we learn about others and ourselves as a result of communication which takes place “between the lines”, along with our verbalised communication, conscious intentions and goals. By examining sequences of communication in this light we can identify implicit or hidden learning processes which take place in seemingly trivial interaction in daily life in schools, day-care centres etc. An exclusive focus on curriculum, knowledge content, official goals and intentions for teaching and education is therefore insufficient, due to its inability to grasp content in parallel learning. We also need to examine and be aware of the communication of values, which are conveyed to others via our patterns of communication in daily life.

This approach can help us to become aware of elements of control, invasion, manipulation or abuse in our interactions and relationships with others. This in turn reveals the need for *reflection*. I will attempt to illustrate this point in the following brief reference to Schibbye’s dialectic theory of relationships.

### **The dialectic theory of the self**

According to Schibbye (2004) the self is seen as a relationship, that is to say we cannot conceive of the self as an isolated entity. The self can only be understood in terms of its relationships to others. My relationship to myself, my view or understanding of myself, is reflected in my relationships with others. These relationships are again an integrated part of my view of my self. Thus Schibbye

describes the self in terms of two integrated dialectic relationships: The “I-me” dialectic and the “self-other” dialectic. These two aspects or sides of the self are seen as mutually interdependent and cannot be understood in isolation from one another.

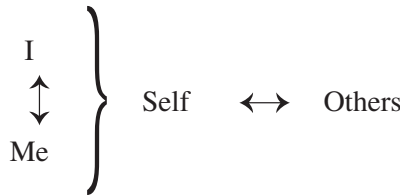


Figure 1  
The self (Det relationelle selv, Schibbye, 2004)

The “I” aspect of the self represents the conscious part of the psyche, that side of us which takes decisions, takes conscious action or is, so to speak, “the ship’s captain”. The “me” aspect refers to our emotions, temperament, dreams, fantasies, our past experience, sexuality, physiological processes and other unconscious aspects of the self (Ritchie, 2004).

This view of the self gives us insight into the vital role which we adults play in the development of the child’s self or identity. We as teachers, day-care centre staff or parents *create conditions for the child’s experience of him- or herself*. Our relationship with the child constitutes a part of the child’s self.

Thus, developmental problems in childhood are according to Schibbye fundamentally problems or disturbances in the two dialectic relationships: disturbances in the “I-me” dialectic and similarly in the “self-other” dialectic (Schibbye, 1999). These disturbances weaken or undermine the ability of the child to reflect, that is to say to have a well developed or harmonious relationship between the “I” and the “me”.

Similarly Schibbye makes the point that we become more robust psychologically through self-reflection, that is to say as the “I” develops or increases its knowledge or “overview” of the “me” (Schibbye 2004).

This emphasis upon the role of relationships in the development of self or identity leads us to what Bae describes as the *power of definition* (in Danish - “definitionsmagt”, Bae, 1996). The power of definition lies in the ways whereby we communicate with the child, how we react - or fail to react - in interaction, and how we comment on the child’s experience and action. As a result of our dependency upon others for the development of self or identity it becomes clear that we all exercise considerable influence or power in our relationships. This is particularly the case in adult-child relationships, where the child is in a vulnerable position. The

nature or quality of the child's self-representations, i.e. the child's image of who he or she is as a person, is dependent upon how we as adults communicate with the child. Thus the development of the child's self-esteem is intrinsically connected to the nature of our communication with the child.

In this light it is vital that teachers and other professionals in education examine the nature of their communication with children. In this connection recognition becomes a powerful asset, which can help us to become aware of how we use or misuse the power of definition. With this insight professionals can actively contribute to positive processes in the construction of the child's self or identity (Bae, 1996). We can as teachers either support or undermine the positive development of the child's self.

### **The four ways of being**

As a result of the broad scope of the concept of recognition Berit Bae proposes four further categories or values, which guide or help teachers and other professionals in their work with recognition in practice. These *four ways of being* as described by Bae are *understanding, confirmation, openness* and *self-reflection* (Bae,1996).

Recognition grants the individual, the sovereign right to define the nature of his experience of himself and the world. Thus recognition encourages the teacher to understand the child in his or her own terms, i.e. from the child's perspective or point of view. This cannot be achieved through an exclusively intellectual or cognitive approach, and requires empathy on the behalf of the teacher, so that he or she can so to speak "tune in", that is to say get a sense or feeling of the child's field of experience.

According to Schibbye, confirmation is a form of communication which affirms the child's experience in a given situation or circumstance (Schibbye 1988, p. 170). That is to say, our communication conveys that the child's inner experience is recognized as real and legitimate. This draws upon our ability to listen and to understand. Through confirmation the child learns that he or she has the right to his or her thoughts, feelings and inner experiences. Thus it is via "(...) confirmation and recognition from others that we are able to develop a differentiated and independent self." (Bae og Waastad 1992, p. 25).

Confirmation is not to be confused with praise or positive feedback, which are forms of assessment or evaluation linked to a subject-object approach. In this respect exaggerated praise deprives the child of the opportunity to address his or her own actions, thoughts, experiences or feelings, as these are defined by the teacher or adult. Genuine confirmation gives the child the space to address and relate to himself and his actions, independent of the adult's perspective. Openness is closely

linked with a non-instrumental approach in our communication, where we give up attempts to use, dominate, manipulate or control others.

Recognition is incompatible with subject-object strategies of this nature. Recognition of the other's integrity and sovereign right to define his or her experience entails an acceptance of the other as seen from his or her perspective. This requires openness on behalf of the adult or teacher, which in turn creates positive conditions for the child's experience of himself and for the development of identity or self.

According to Bae self-reflection is intrinsically linked to demarcation (*afgrænsning*). This involves a distinction between our own thoughts, impulses, feelings and corresponding processes or phenomena within others. Through this process we come into contact with and become familiar with sides or aspects of ourselves. We come to reflect upon these parts of ourselves, or with reference to Schibbye, upon the content of the "me". Thus demarcation involves a separation of aspects of oneself from aspects of others, and at the same time gives us knowledge or experience of ourselves. This requires that we take time to reflect upon our contribution to and role in our communication with others. It assumes also that we recognize the other as our equal, as an individual with the sovereign right to define his or her experience.

For us as adults, working with self-reflection and demarcation in practice can be demanding as a result of our habits and defence mechanisms. That this is a worthwhile endeavour, as we through our efforts improve conditions for the formation or construction of self or identity of the child.

### **On recognition and development**

The point is to clarify the role of recognition in learning processes by referring to an interaction sequence, which highlights the role of communication in children's development and learning. The intention here is to illustrate the way in which our communication with children affects how they think about themselves. The episode, from a class of six year-olds, is taken from a research programme focusing on interaction between staff and children in educational institutions in Norway (Bae, 1996). Now, the original Norwegian text slightly modified.

*It's Monday morning and the class is assembled. The teacher asks the class if anyone has anything they'd like to tell the rest of the class.*

*Peter immediately puts up his hand and says eagerly "I've been fishing!" He looks expectantly at the teacher.*

*"Really?," says the teacher looking attentively at Peter. "That sounds exciting, what would you like to tell us about?" (with her tone of voice signalling openness and curiosity).*



“We lit a bonfire on the beach, and there were huge flames!”, declares Peter enthusiastically. Everyone listens while Peter tells about the fishing trip and the dramatic bonfire. As the story draws to an end the teacher takes up the topic of fish, which they discuss together. She then tells the class about fresh and salt water fish, and about how fish reproduce.

The teacher demonstrates *understanding* by clearly showing interest in Peter’s story and by responding to Peter’s eagerness in an attentive and open manner. She shows respect for Peter’s perspective via verbal and non verbal communication. She gives him time and space to tell his story before going on to talk with the class about fish as a general topic, thus sharing the power of definition in the dialogue.

Through her *openness* and attentive response to Peter’s initiative the teacher *confirms* Peter’s enthusiasm, his experience of the fishing trip and of himself. The dialogue indicates that she is aware of the fact that Peter has his perspective or view of the fishing trip and that she as the teacher has another (demarcation). In this respect the dialogue provides space for both perspectives, where teacher and pupil are two equal subjects. By giving up a degree of control in her communication with the class she creates space for Peter as a subject to tell his story.

This kind of experience in communication with others provides the basis for constructive processes in the “I-me” dialectic, where Peter can learn that he is someone who is listened to and respected, someone worthwhile. Similar patterns of communication will over a longer period of time, strengthen his identity or sense of self.

### **On recognition and learning**

The sequence above also highlights how communication affects content-oriented learning processes, i.e. learning of curriculum-based subject matter. Our attempt is to illustrate the active role recognition can play in learning by briefly referring to the Danish professor Knud Illeris’s contemporary learning theory, *The Three Dimensions of learning* (2002).

According to Illeris, learning is a holistic process which includes, as two integrated processes, a direct or indirect social interaction and an internal psychological acquisition process. All learning includes three simultaneous and integrated dimensions: a cognitive content dimension, an emotional, psychodynamic, motivational dimension, and thirdly a social and societal dimension. Although we can separate the part processes and dimensions analytically, these elements remain part of an integrated whole. Illeris illustrates these basic principles by use of the following model:



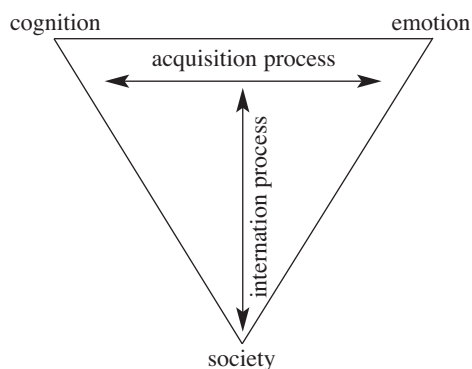


Figure 2  
The learning dimensions (Illeris 2002)

The holistic nature of learning is seen in the intrinsic link between the different elements in the model, such as the mutual interplay between the vertical and horizontal processes, as illustrated in figure 2. Interplay between the cognitive and the emotional dimensions - which can be described in terms of metacognition (Beyer, 1997) - cannot be understood in isolation from the vertical line, the individual's interaction with others. Thus learning is intrinsically linked to the way in which we interact and relate to the world around us, for example in the case of a child's communication with his teacher in a formal school setting.

By referring to this model we can see how interaction between Peter and the teacher influences Peter's learning. In this case the learning point or topic in question is fish. The teacher's communication with Peter – with its elements of understanding, openness and confirmation - is clearly in keeping with the spirit of recognition. In the episode we see how recognition on behalf of the teacher creates a positive platform for following up on the topic. As Peter's story comes to an end, the class hears about salt and fresh water fish and the reproduction of fish. That it is more likely that Peter and the rest of the class will learn the subject matter in question (knowledge about fish) as a result of the recognition-based communication processes initiated by the teacher. The teacher's recognition of Peter, her adequate response to his enthusiasm, helps Peter focus attention on the teacher's communication, on the subject matter, and to develop motivation to hear and learn about other aspects of the topic in question. Communication between the teacher and Peter – on the vertical line - furthers the acquisition process or Peter's learning of subject matter on the horizontal line.

The suggestion is that communication patterns of this nature will over a longer period of time create a supportive learning environment in the classroom, which can have a positive effect on content-oriented learning processes. The teacher's positive

response to Peter's initiative and the ensuing encouragement of positive processes within the "I-me" dialectic will provide a supportive platform for Peter. This will in turn encourage him to take an interest in communication with his teacher and classmates and thereby improve his chances for learning.

Illeris makes the point that the nature of the learning result with respect to usefulness and durability will be closely connected to how the emotional dimension has been functioning as part of the entire process. In this connection the mutual interplay of the vertical and horizontal processes show that communication content has a decisive influence on what we learn - the learning result.

## Final remarks

Along this article is argued the case for recognition as an invaluable asset in education. On a final note attention is drawing to the results of a Danish study *Good school practice* (Mehlbye and Ringmose, 2004). The intention of the study was to identify key factors behind good practice in schools, i.e. factors which lead to academic achievement and which enable pupils to go on to further education.

The study concludes that good school practice is the result of a complex interaction between many different factors, and that one cannot draw a direct correlation between certain practices and grade level. However the study states with respect to teaching in the classroom that "(...) *it is possible to show how different practices can contribute to either providing good opportunities for or limiting pupils' participation and learning.*" (p. 147)

In the rapport summary eight key factors are identified, including two factors which underline the role of communication in learning:

1. "*The teachers' level of openness in communication and interaction can be crucial for the pupil's participation*". (p. 148)

2. "*Recognition and acknowledgement of the children's resources are closely connected to the teachers' knowledge of the pupils and whether the teachers consider them to be children/young people rather than just 'pupils'. An acknowledgement of the children and the young people as having an identity other than that of a pupil can help break down the inflexible and marginalising pupil categories like 'second generation immigrant boys', 'troublemakers', 'scarf girls', etc.*" (p. 148)

The study's emphasis on communication and on the relationship between teachers and pupils clearly indicates that recognition has an important role to play in improving conditions for learning in the classroom. In this light *learning beyond cognition* is clearly more than a slogan. As teachers and professionals in education we can be guided by recognition to improve academic performance, and at the same time encourage broader aspects of learning and development.

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